Forgiveness, Reparation, and Remorse

Reckoning with Truthful Apology

By

Anthony Bash and Martyn Percy

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To Morna D. Hooker

In deep gratitude

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Foreword

This book testifies to our deep and empathic friendship for more than three decades. For different reasons, we have also independently both been thinking about forgiveness, truthful apologies, resentment, regret, and anger. In writing this book we have tuned in to the other and the ecology of what we are addressing to produce a shared statement of what we think. We believe this book is all the better for the confluence of our viewpoints and we trust it is a coherent statement of our shared views. Our partnership in writing the book has been a happy experience for us both.

Many people and many influences have gone into the writing of this book, and it is not possible to acknowledge them all in this foreword. Martyn Percy thanks Mark Williams, Peter Selby, Suzanne Clackson, and Deborah Kinsey for their conversations, insights, and support over many years, and especially in thinking through some of the themes and issues in this book. Alan Wilson (who sadly passed away quite suddenly in 2024) was a fine partner in conversation and remains a much missed and deeply mourned colleague and friend. As ever, and through her constant love, counsel, and solidarity, the largest indebtedness rests with Emma Percy, about whom David Jenkins, in inimitable words over dinner one evening, remarked that "Marrying her is the cleverest thing you'll ever do." He has not been proved wrong.

Anthony Bash would like to thank Hannah Bash, James Broad, Philip Johnston, Marcus Bagg, Leslie Walker, Alex Hopkins, Stephen Cherry, Owen May, Geoffrey Scarre, and David Sheard for reading parts of this book in draft form or for helpful conversations about some of the issues we explore. Sarah Cotes has proofread the whole book with meticulous care and made helpful comments on what Martyn and Anthony wrote: they are very grateful to her. Anthony acknowledges with deep appreciation the influence of Melanie Bash for helping to shape him to think psychologically. Melanie has also endured many conversations – sometimes (Melanie might say 'often') at unreasonably late times – about his developing thoughts as he was writing his contribution to this book. He owes a loving debt to Melanie and to her influence.

Anthony Bash began his doctoral studies in 1990 under the supervision of Morna D. Hooker, Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. Morna has been a profound and continuing influence on him, and he dedicates this book to her in deep gratitude.

Chapter 1

Setting the Scene

Recent Interest

Currently – and after almost two millennia of relative uninterest in the topic – there is much academic 'noise' about forgiveness and interpersonal relationships. Using a different metaphor, Luke Russell refers to 'the thicket of contemporary philosophical disagreement about the nature of forgiveness' (2023, 3). To take three recent examples of the 'thicket' explored by professors of philosophy, Martha Nussbaum (2016, 5) criticizes what she calls '*the road of payback*'.[1] By this Nussbaum means 'the mistake of thinking that the suffering of the wrongdoer somehow restores, or contributes to restoring, the important thing that was damaged' (*ibid.*). Christian F. Mihut writes that 'forgivingness' is rooted in a gracious, hopeful, and merciful disposition and is incompatible with anger. He says that 'the penance of offenders is not always a necessary condition for extending forgiveness' (2023, 5). Last, Luke Russell whom we first quoted above suggests that there are many ways of forgiving, enabling victims of wrongdoing to move away from anger and conflict. He suggests that sometimes it is morally wrong to forgive because it is right for victims to remain in conflict with wrongdoers to protect both themselves and other people. Russell concludes that 'forgiveness is sometimes correctly targeted, well-motivated, and beneficial, but sometimes is off-target, poorly motivated, and even catastrophic' (2023, 5).

In this book, we try and cut through the 'thicket of contemporary philosophical disagreement' as well as the different approaches to interpersonal forgiveness that are suggested in academic writings and in some religious writings. We also seek to relate what we say to reparation, remorse, and regret.

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[1] The italics are Nussbaum's.

The Origins of the Western Tradition of Forgiveness

To restate in acceptable language an otherwise not very politically correct joke, a tourist asks for directions to a certain place and is told in reply, 'Well, sir, if I were you, I wouldn't start from here.'

In western thought the roots of contemporary forgiveness and related subjects (such as remorse and regret, repentance, and reparation) lie in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). These traditional religious documents *are* the place from which to start, even though their significance is often underplayed and even overlooked. Knowing what the starting point is will help elucidate *how* we have got to where we are and *why* we have got to where we are.

To put it straightforwardly, in the Hebrew Bible God is the forgiver of sins of human beings. To sin was not to keep the laws of God. Sins are regarded as grievous, and forgiveness is the divine response usually when human beings repent.[2] The Christian Scriptures took up an already nascent stream of thought in late Second Temple Judaism (the Judaism of the two hundred years or so before the birth of Jesus) and began to develop a theology of interpersonal forgiveness, forgiveness offered by one person in response to another's wrongdoing.[3]

There are five elements to interpersonal forgiveness in the Christian Scriptures: first, wrongdoers acknowledge guilt; second, wrongdoers show clear signs of remorse (or at least regret); third, wrongdoers repent, by which is meant they acknowledge what they did was wrong and choose to desist from repeating the wrong; next, wrongdoers make appropriate reparation;[4] last, those injured by the wrongdoing forgive those who have wronged them. It is open to debate whether in such situations to forgive is a moral duty or a moral virtue. It is also open to debate whether it is commendable (either as a duty or a virtue) to forgive wrongdoers unconditionally with-

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[2] On forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible, see Shepherd and Briggs 2022.

[3] See from the Apocrypha, Sirach 28:2-5. In the passage, Sirach (c. 196-175 BCE) says that anyone desiring God's forgiveness must first show forgiveness to personal enemies.

[4] Regret, repentance, and reparation have been explored in academic writings. Remorse less so, but now see Cox 1999, Gaita 2004, and Bash 2020 on remorse.

out evidence of the first four of the five elements of forgiveness above.[5]

Into this modest shrub – it was not yet a thicket – Christianity in the period after the completion of the writing of the Christian Scriptures should have grafted the idea of interpersonal forgiveness. Christianity in this period largely failed to do this because the focus of attention (especially in the later period of the medieval church) was mainly on wrongs that were regarded as being against God. Wrongs against people were barely considered and when they were, they were treated as sins against God. In other words, a way of thinking about forgiveness based on the emphases of the Hebrew Bible was carried over into medieval theology, with complex arrangements worked out for how repentance could be demonstrated.[6] Forgiveness as an aspect of interpersonal relations was largely overlooked in religious writings.

Although the Christian Scriptures do not explicitly state this, in the Gospels it is implicit that forgiveness offered and received by individuals is of grievous or serious wrongs that are also sins against God.[7] One Greek word-group is almost always used to refer to forgiveness. In the letters of the Christian Scriptures (i.e., not the Gospels) different Greek words are sometimes used to describe both forgiveness in the sense meant in the Gospels and a forgiving approach in the early churches to righting disrupted relationships. The emphasis in the second sense is more on managing the day-to-day rough and tumble of relationships that sometimes go askew

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[5] See Bash 2007 that explores a Christian theology of interpersonal forgiveness from the Christian Scriptures; see also Konstan 2010, 91-124 on divine forgiveness. Konstan refers to Bash 2007 in places but says (*contra* Bash) that in the Christian Scriptures 'a fully developed conception of forgiveness as an interpersonal human process is not yet present' (*ibid*., 124). We hope this book robustly addresses Konstan's view.

[6] On contrition in the medieval period, see a summary in Bash 2020, 85-91. We wonder if this is the model of interpersonal forgiveness that Martha Nussbaum has in mind when she wrote about 'the mistake of thinking that the suffering of the wrongdoer somehow restores, or contributes to restoring, the important thing that was damaged' (2016, 5).

[7] E.g., the language of the Lord's Prayer in the Christian Scriptures (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4) draws a parallel between the 'debts' that God forgives and the 'debts' that men and women are to forgive. It makes no sense to refer, on the one hand, to 'debts' owed to God for sin and, on the other, to 'debts' owed to other people for no more than peccadilloes.

rather than on righting egregious wrongdoing.[8] In other words, there are two streams of developing thought about forgiveness in the Christian Scriptures – one stream relating to egregious interpersonal wrongs that were palpably also sins against God's law and another stream, sometimes referred to in different language, about how to restore day-to-day conflicts in relationships in a community.

Divergent Approaches

Philosophers in the last quarter of the twentieth century[9] began to explore the nature and forms of forgiveness without critically engaging with the Christian Scriptures. Perhaps we cannot blame them, as Christian theologians showed relatively little interest in interpersonal forgiveness.[10] The Christian Scriptures are nuanced, subtle, and complex on forgiveness, though they also relatively brief on the subject. They also anticipate some of the questions that have been explored by contemporary philosophers. To give examples of the way the Christian Scriptures have been largely overlooked by philosophers, Charles Griswold included in *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (2007) a ground-breaking study of language about forgiveness in ancient Greek culture and philosophical traditions.[11] However, he did not also include what could have been an equally ground-breaking study of forgiveness in the Greek texts of the Christian Scriptures. It is curious that such an important source of Greek language about forgiveness was ignored. Such a 'light touch' approach to the Christian Scriptures is sometimes true even of contemporary authors who write as Christian theological thinkers. From within the Christian tradition and as recently as 2022, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby in *The Power of Reconciliation* offers no more than passing comments on the nature of interpersonal forgiveness in the context of reconciliation.

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[8] We discuss this further in chapter Nine.

[9] As late as 1968, Peter Strawson wrote that 'forgiveness… is a rather unfashionable subject in moral philosophy' (1974, 6). See also the review of the literature on forgiveness in the twentieth century in Biggar 2001.

[10] See Bash 2007, 23-35 for a brief history of forgiveness studies. Jones 1995 is an exception.

[11] Its conclusions have been doubted. See Nussbaum 2016, 4n.15, 11n.29 and Konstan 57.

Resulting Confusion

To go back to our joke, it may well have been better if, from the 1970s onwards, writers on forgiveness had not started from where they did because conceptual and terminological confusion has arisen as a result. We can go further: many academic and non-academic contemporary writers about forgiveness pay what seems to us to be no more than lip service to the primary (biblical) sources of the Christian tradition about forgiveness. They also skate over the foundational place of these sources when it comes to the development of Christian and western thinking about forgiveness. Their true starting point is altogether something different, though often unarticulated and inexplicit. Luke Russell sums this up in *Real Forgiveness* when he says that forgiveness 'is centrally important to Christianity, so it is surprizing to discover that [forgiveness] was a neglected topic throughout the history of Western philosophy' (2023, 2). He adds that the work of influential philosophers from the 1970s onwards 'shaped, for good or ill, the way today's philosophers conceive of forgiveness' (*ibid.*).

We go further. In our view (and as we shall see) the way philosophers have conceived of forgiveness since the 1970s has been with only passing reference to biblical primary sources. True, a formerly undervalued and largely overlooked topic has come of age – but in its adulthood its *aetiology* has been undervalued and largely overlooked. The result is that the lack of careful, reflective, critical analyses of the Christian primary sources on forgiveness has not been 'for good' in the contemporary exploration of forgiveness. Because of this, it is not always clear how and why we got to where we are, or what contribution past understanding can make to the way present understanding developed. The result is an impoverished view of forgiveness.

We hope to show that the Christian primary sources are more than of antiquarian interest and that they have a useful place in the development of contemporary critical thinking about interpersonal forgiveness. (We have a rather less enthusiastic view about the way forgiveness was thought about in the period after the completion of the writings in the-Christian Scriptures.) Of course, we recognize that every generation re-thinks and develops what it understands to be its ethical norms, such as to forgive. However, it is also wise to understand, build on, and develop existing structures of thought or overtly to jettison them entirely. More or less ignoring them is not the way to go. We think there is much wisdom in what Maya Angelou

(1928-2014) said, 'I have great respect for the past. If you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you're going.'[12]

We therefore take issue with Griswold who sees 'no reason why we should be bound by [the] historical genealogy' of the western tradition of forgiveness and who therefore offers an 'analysis of forgiveness as a secular virtue (that is, as not dependent on any notion of the divine' (2007, xv)). To be clear: this book (i) does not presuppose 'any notion of the divine'; (ii) does not treat forgiveness as *bound* by its historical genealogy; (iii) includes in its analysis of forgiveness the ongoing *influence* of the historical genealogy of the contemporary approaches to forgiveness; and (iv) does not make any assumptions about faith or non-faith in the reading and interpretation of secular or religious ancient texts about forgiveness

Reasons for Divergent Approaches

Why have philosophers given Christian primary sources on forgiveness little more than a cursory glance? Besides the fact that Christian theologians formerly gave philosophers little to build on,[13] we suggest three principal reasons. The first is that the biblical sources were not written in the style of philosophical discourses, such as we have with Plato and Aristotle. Some of the material – whether about Jesus or from Paul (Saul of Tarsus, c. 5 BCE – 64/65 CE) – is highly polemical and not systematically presented.

Second, the context of the sources is an intra-Jewish quarrel about the identity and teaching – and even the orthodoxy – of a wandering Jewish preacher and teacher, Jesus, the supposed son of Joseph. In addition, Jeus came from Nazareth, part of the province of Galilee in northern Palestine. Galilee was a cultural backwater of the Roman empire and was disparaged by the Romans.[14] It was also not regarded by Jewish people as a place of

[12] In an interview for *The Arizona Republic* in 2011 – see The Arizona Republic (azcentral.com).

[13] However, there is now plenty of thoughtful work by theologians on interpersonal forgiveness that outside the discipline of theology is little more than cursorily referred to.

[14] It was also a place of sedition: for example, in 6 CE, Judas from Galilee led an unsuccessful rebellion against the Romans (Acts 5:37). See also the disparaging remarks about the Galilean accent in Matthew 26:73.

Jewish learning.[15] Further, some of the writers of the Christian Scriptures such as Paul sought to develop the thought of Jesus outside a Jewish context, thereby creating an added layer of difficulty for readers and interpreters of what he wrote.[16] Despite these difficulties, there are specialists in the field of biblical studies whose work is available and which could elucidate the contexts of what is in the Christian Scriptures. The work could usefully contribute to contemporary academic discussion about forgiveness.

Last, Jesus left no writings. What we know of what he said is drawn from the recollections of some of those who had heard Jesus, modified to some extent in the generation after the death of Jesus to make the teachings applicable to that period, and then set down in what are now the Gospels. These are not insuperable reasons for not considering the early texts, as there are examples of other influential thinkers who left no writings and whose thought may have been the subject of later development. The thought of Socrates (c. 470-399 BCE) is principally drawn from dialogues now known through Plato (c. 427-348 BCE) and Xenophon (c. 430-355/4 BCE). His thought is regarded as difficult to reconstruct from the secondary sources that remain, though it remains a significant influence on western thought.

Overview of the Book

One of our aims in this book has been to introduce new clarity into discussion about forgiveness and related subjects such as apologies, remorse, and reparation. We do this by drawing on a broad spectrum of sources of learning. Another aim has been to ensure that we are writing more than about matters relevant to the academy and its internal discussions and disagreements. Forgiveness, reparation, remorse, and truthful apologies are issues that can affect all people. We have therefore been careful to make sure that

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[15] See the scathing question in John 1:46 ('Can anything good come out of Nazareth?')

[16] There is even dispute about what he did write. Of the 13 letters that bear Paul's name, perhaps as many as six (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothey, 2 Timothy, and Titus) are regarded as possibly no more than based on earlier letters of Paul and adapted by a later writer in the period after Paul's death or, in accordance with convention at the time, written by successors writing in Paul's name or basing the letters on earlier (genuine) letters of Paul that have now been lost (Charlesworth 1992; Porter and Fewster 2013; cf. Ehrman 2013).

what we have written both takes account and tries to make sense of the day-to-day experiences of people. We have therefore sought to make sure that the book is useful and practical for the public voice of academy. To be clear: this is *not* a self-help book. Rather, we trust it will be received as a thoughtful work of academic scholarship that takes forward reflection about a series of interconnected and complex topics not only in the academy but also more widely to the public through the academy.

In the remainder of this chapter, we give a broad outline of what is to come to whet the reader's appetite to go on and read the rest of the book.

1. Siloed Approaches

We observe two problems with the study of forgiveness and related subjects. First, forgiveness and related subjects are often explored in one academic discipline without reference to other academic disciplines that are also exploring the same subjects. Second, forgiveness and related subjects are sometimes treated discretely, even within the same discipline and even though they are co-extensive and related to one another. We hope this book will be a helpful way to reflect on the interconnectedness of the topics we consider not only within discrete academic disciplines but also with other academic disciplines.

This book is not solely or principally a work of theology because if it were we would be falling into the trap of taking a siloed approach.[17] There is much in contemporary, secular discussions about forgiveness that can develop and enrich the Christian tradition, just as the Christian tradition can develop and enrich contemporary secular work.[18] The last word on forgiveness is not in the Christian tradition, and the last word on forgiveness is not in contemporary thought either. There needs to be a process of reciprocal listening and learning – and of learning from each other's mistakes and blind spots.

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[17] We fear we will displease many by such an approach. To some, we will be regarded as too theological, and to others we will be regarded as neither theological enough nor orthodox enough.

[18] Thus, we disagree with Kolnai 1973-4 and Murphy 1988 who 'transplant the discussion of forgiveness from a religious to a religion-neutral context' (Adams 1988, 289-90) as we believe that both contexts have a part to play.

2. Moral Wrongs

In saying that this book is not written as a work of theology brings us to an important observation about a degree of shared understanding – and a point of growing divergence. Broadly speaking, until the mid- to late-twentieth century formulations of morals and morality were descriptive of the morality of the biblical sources. What could be forgiven were therefore moral wrongs as described in biblical sources. The moral wrongs one human being did to another were also called 'sins' because the wrongs were regarded as breaches of divine injunctions.

Moral philosophers also generally assume interpersonal forgiveness to be forgiveness of moral wrongs, though the source of morality is widely debated and not taken to be from biblical traditions. What 'moral' means in the phrase 'moral wrongs' as philosophers understand the term are the normative codes of conduct and patterns of behaviour that would be put forward and followed by all rational people. Moral wrongs understood this way lead to 'moral injuries'.

In contrast with both these starting points, some contemporary (and often popular) discourse about forgiveness does not assume that forgiveness is only of moral wrongs described in either of these traditional ways. It also – rightly in our view – assumes that people can forgive those who have hurt, offended, distressed, or wounded them but not through moral wrongdoing (whether descriptively or normatively derived as described above). What counts for such people when it comes to such injuries are the effects of one person's actions on another's sense of wellbeing. In this sense what is 'moral' (if it is helpful to call it 'moral' at all) are the outlook and standards that individuals accept for themselves and expect of others. Whether these coincide with morality descriptively or normatively understood is not relevant. Such an approach to morals and morality we call 'non-traditional' or similar words.[19]

In saying that forgiveness may pertain to injuries to the self that are caused by behaviours outside the traditionally moral realm, we are referring to boundary transgressing behaviours that demean or diminish a person's

[19] In chapters Two and Ten we suggest a situational basis to Christian ethics that is consonant with this non-traditional approach to ethics.

sense of self, a person's self-respect, and a person's self-esteem, whether the behaviours were intended to be injurious or not. In our view, the sense of self is not exclusively or even necessarily moral but is derived from a nexus of different factors that will vary from person to person. The factors may be social, emotional, physical, as well as moral. We think that injury to the self from boundary transgressing behaviours *is* legitimately within the scope of what is forgivable.[20] In other words, such behaviours lead to what we could call 'non-traditional moral injuries'.

Our approach to moral wrongs and to forgiveness in this book includes the wider, non-specialist, non-traditional approach to what can be forgiven when relationships have been damaged, for we do not want to tell people what is or is not moral or within the purview of interpersonal forgiveness and so forgivable. Our starting point is that we accept and respect people 'where they are' and not where we think they should be according to pre-determined schemes of morals and morality. To be clear, in this book the words 'morals', 'moral wrongs', 'moral injuries', and 'morality' may be understood within the context of the words 'morals' and 'morality' as explained in all three of the ways above.

To clarify, there is tension between the morally-focussed approach to forgiveness that is implicit in the approach of both the Christian Scriptures and moral philosophy on the one hand, and the more relational, situational, and existential approach in popular culture and practice. This book attempts to make sense of the changing approach to forgiveness, while also both affirming much of the traditional approach and critiquing it in places. We therefore take a pluriform approach to ensure that our discussion of forgiveness reflects both changes in contemporary culture and understanding and what we regard as necessary changes to the traditional approach. In short, forgiveness is now a messy, sprawling topic that no longer fits neat heuristic categories.

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[20] It is possible to read much of what Jeffrie G. Murphy says about resentment as referring to responses to *all* boundary transgressing behaviours (Murphy and Hampton 1988, 14-34). However, Murphy does specifically refer to resentment of 'moral injuries' in places (e.g., in his initial description of resentment in Murphy and Hampton 1988, 16). This strongly suggests that he has in mind moral injuries only and not other boundary transgressing behaviours that lack a moral component.

3. Resentment

Also underlying the discussion in this book is the recognition that sometimes people feel rage and a sense of injustice when they have experienced moral injury.[21] The rage and sense of injustice are called 'resentment' by those engaged in forgiveness studies. We write of the cruelty and intrusive pain that come from being violated, whether by people or organizations.[22] We do not need to describe violence or physical brutality to illustrate these. We draw on many contemporary examples of cheating, lying, obfuscation, and excuses that most people will be familiar with. We also write of emollient apologies scripted by corporate lawyers that stroke the victims of organizational abuse and offer them little more than 'tea and sympathy'. We ask – and, we trust, answer – not only what makes up a true apology but also how a true apology can lead to action and change.

We think that some of the contemporary approaches to resentment can be deeply flawed, and especially so in the Christian tradition. There is a culture of lauding a rush to forgive or apologize. The place of repentance and reparation is sometimes overlooked. Not taking account of injuries so that one can more easily and quickly forgive is also sometimes regarded as desirable and even an exemplary moral good. We disagree. Facing and dealing with resentment matters.

4. What is Forgiveness?

At its most general, forgiveness may take place before, during, or after people address and right (as best they can) the wrongs and hurts they have either done or experienced. Our view is that forgiveness best takes place after wrongs and hurts have been addressed, with forgiveness one of the signs that the formerly disrupted relationship has been repaired. We think of this as 'authentic' or 'richly textured' forgiveness.

Our view is that one of the things that marks out authentic forgiveness from many other responses to injuries (but not uniquely so) is that the injured

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[21] The term 'moral injury' is widely used in forgiveness studies. The breadth of the meaning of the word 'moral' has led us sometimes to refer to 'injuries' rather than to 'moral injuries'.

[22] In relation to Martyn Percy, see Braemar 2024.

relationship will have been repaired following a principled response by both wrongdoer and the injured party. By this we mean that the person who caused the injury has respond in appropriate ways – such as by repentance and reparation. We also mean that the injured person has responded in appropriate ways – such as by holding to account the person who caused the injury, by asserting that their personhood has been violated, and by not taking revenge. This sort of forgiveness if it takes place is therefore, in our view, the result of *reciprocal moral responses*.[23]

Outside these general observations, people describe the boundaries of forgiveness in different ways and there is not a generally agreed definition of forgiveness – a precise and accurate statement that clarifies and specifies what forgiveness is.[24] We think this is because forgiveness is what people make of it. Repairing an injured relationship – one of the indispensable characteristics of richly textured forgiveness in our view – will mean different things to different people. Certainly, we do not want to legislate and tell people what forgiveness is or is not, though we do think that some of what is called forgiveness can be more like kindness, generosity of spirit, and a pragmatic desire to let bygones be bygones.

Forgiveness also depends on the interplay of several variables. One of them is how wronged people regard their injuries. Some will regard them as typical of what one no more than needs to put up with in life. Others will regard them as hurtful and as needing to be addressed with the person who caused them. One person's experience of egregious injury is to another person the trifling effect of an annoying misdemeanour, the consequences of which can be shaken off with few or no ill effects. Another of the variables is that the way one regards the wrong may also vary or fluctuate with time. Meek surrender to abuse or exploitation can later lead to anger, bitterness, and resentment. The wrong someone said they had overlooked and the former response they had made may later need to be revisited. Wrongdoers take their victims – and what the victims believe the scope of forgiveness to be – as they find them.

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[23] In chapter Eleven we suggest there may be limited exceptions to the reciprocal nature of forgiveness.

[24] We prefer to *describe* forgiveness as we understand it to be, highlighting what we regard as its characteristics and qualities but not trying to be comprehensive. The boundaries of forgiveness are indistinct and nebulous.

To be clear, even outside the framework of our own views as to the scope of authentic forgiveness, we do not 'legislate' and say what is or is not forgiving behaviour. We are not the arbiters of language or the 'Language Thought Police'. As we say in chapter Four, we prefer to think of 'forgivenesses', different types of (what people regard as) forgiveness that are reached in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons, though we do have our own views as to the richest and most compelling forms of forgiveness.

In addition to forgiveness being one type or set of reciprocal moral responses that evidences the repair of injured relationships:

a) Part of our focus is on the response of a person to the injury experienced, and not on the motives and intentions of the person who caused the injury. What counts are the perceptions and viewpoint of the injured person and the impact of the wrongdoer's actions on the injured person.

b) We think that forgiveness is misplaced if cheap, or glib, and that it is misdirected when not in response to authentic, deep repentance and genuine reparation that are appropriate to the injury caused. Without such a foundation for forgiveness, there is no closure for those who continue to suffer from the consequences of past abuses. If repentance and reparation are permanently pending, so is forgiveness. The three – repentance, reparation, forgiveness – belong together. In this context, repentance is both affect and behaviour, with affect broad enough to encompass remorse or regret.

c) The focus of recent discussion about forgiveness and repentance has principally been on interpersonal relations, and not also on the wrongdoing of organizations, communities, countries, and churches.[25] Repentance makes demands both on individuals and on structures and communities that do wrong. There is therefore a place for rethinking how the scope of forgiveness can be developed to include the wrongs of institutions and organizations. Throughout the book, therefore, we discuss remorse, regret, apologies, and reparation (and sometimes even the absence of some of them) as

[25] There has also been increasing interest in reparative justice. We refer to this later in the book.

parts of the kaleidoscopic ways that people respond to wrongdoing whether interpersonal or corporate and systemic.

5. New Analyses of Forgiving Behaviour

The constituents and expressions of the subjects we discuss in this book are co-dependent. They are related but not identical, genetically related but discrete. Our approach will be both inductive and deductive, discursive as well as analytical, with each part intended to inform the other parts. As by now is obvious, there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to forgiveness and the related subjects of reparation, repentance, and truthful apologies. What we hope is also obvious is that how we think of forgiveness and the related subjects will depend on context: for example, forgiveness in an interpersonal context will be differently construed from the way forgiveness is construed in settings of systemic wrongdoing. Because the subjects we consider are context-dependent, this book is more extensive in the range of what it discusses than will typically be found in books on forgiveness or apologies or regret.

As for other contributions this book seeks to make, in chapters Two, Nine, and Fifteen we identify four markers that typically characterize forgiveness. We explain that the markers characterize other responses to wrongdoing that are not necessarily forgiving responses. We also say that the responses of the injured party and the wrongdoer to the markers will determine whether the markers constitute a way to forgiveness for them. In chapter Four we look at alternative behaviours that have the same psycho-social outcomes as conventionally forgiving behaviours. We say that the capacity to empathize is an essential characteristic of someone when it comes to repairing injured relationships.

In other places we critique some of the taxonomies of forgiving behaviour that people have used, and we develop our own. We suggest that forgiveness is either undisclosed, unconditional, or interdependent (chapters Eleven and Twelve). In chapter Nine, we also discuss what 'forgiven-ness' and 'forgivingness' are and observe that forgiveness can be described as 'punctiliar' or as a process that is 'incremental'. We also explain what 'inchoate' forgivingness is. Because we think that the richest form of forgiveness is when it is interdependent, we think that forgiveness is best thought of

as a *reciprocated moral response*[26] when both parties have come to a mutually agreed point of forgiving and being forgiven.[27]

Aurel Kolnai refers to the 'logical havoc' of forgiveness and in chapters Twelve and Fifteen we seek to address – and rebut – what he says of the 'havoc'. Additionally, in *The Human Condition* (1958) Hannah Arendt highlighted that the past cannot be reversed or undone in the often-quoted phrase 'the predicament of irreversibility'. We explore the implications of this in chapter Fifteen. We disagree with Arendt that forgiveness can 'undo the deeds of the past' (1968, 237). In the chapter, we identify three further aspects of forgiveness that might also be included in the so-called 'logical havoc' of forgiveness that arise from the predicament of irreversibility. We hope the fourth marker of forgiveness described in chapter Fifteen rescues forgiveness from the havoc.[28]

6. Not Forgiving

In parts of this book, we explore what those who want to forgive may constructively and helpfully do if they are not able forgive. Even though this is not a book on the ethics of *un*forgiveness or about wanting to forgive but not being able to, we also discuss occasions when people may choose not to forgive because they do not believe that it is appropriate for them in their situation to forgive. We also affirm that sometimes deciding not to forgive can be as much a careful, thoughtful moral response to wrongdoing as to forgive. There *are* other ways of wisely responding to wrongdoing apart from by forgiveness without falling into (what we see as) the

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[26] In saying that forgiveness is a set of reciprocal moral responses we mean that both parties respond in a morally appropriate way to wrongs experienced or caused. In saying that forgiveness is a reciprocated moral response, we mean that both parties agree to an outcome that they regard as 'forgiving' and 'forgiveness'.

[27] It is true in one sense that 'forgiveness is an attitude held only by victims towards wrongdoers' (Radzik 2009, 117) but this is not to see forgiving and being forgiven as properly seen as interdependent and co-dependent (see chapter Twelve). Radzik's approach also legitimizes what we call 'undisclosed forgiveness' and 'unconditional forgiveness' (see chapter Eleven) about which we have significant doubts.

[28] In chapter Five we suggest that forgiveness is inherently dualistic, and this observation probably does introduce an irresolvable complexity into the nature of forgiveness if we hold to a monist view of human identity.

trap of vengefulness or passivity. There can also be a place for the rage of unforgiveness.[29]

7. Systemic Wrongs and Reparation

This book also seeks to explore the complexities of apologies, reparation, and remorse when it comes to the anger, powerlessness, and even rage that the victims of systemic abuse and exploitation sometimes feel. By 'systemic' we mean 'belonging to the larger system and its structures, culture, norms, and outlook'. Systemic wrongdoing in an organization or other institution often arises from the failure to identify and outlaw abusive behaviour and other wrongdoing. The failure can be from the structure, policies, and practices of the organization, with the wrong behaviour often known about and even tolerated, though not necessarily understood as being wrong but regarded as 'always the way we have done it'.

Systemic wrongdoing goes back at least as far as the Christian Scriptures and is highlighted there. What are we to make of the premeditated way Jesus drove out the moneychangers and traders from the Temple precincts (John 2:13-22), for example? Jesus created mayhem in the Temple and upset the people who were trading there. He drove them out with a whip he had made himself. His actions in the Temple were reckless, violent, and intemperate – yet also wise as a cry of rage for the powerless and disadvantaged.

More specifically, how can a country that has grievously exploited another – such as by slavery in former times – demonstrate remorse about former exploitation and offer a meaningful apology that is more than an anodyne, platitudinous statement? To suggest how, we rework what we have identified as applicable in an interpersonal setting, namely reparation. Reparation helps to ensure that apologies are robust, coherent, and even costly. We reflect in chapter Ten on the forms reparation will take when it comes to righting former wrongdoing by one nation to another.

8. New Horizons of Forgiveness

In chapter Sixteen, together with what we say in chapter Eight, we discuss what we call 'new horizons' of forgiveness, developed analogously from

[29] On this see also Cherry 2023, 2.

the four markers of forgiveness that we identify. We re-imagine these makers to apply to individuals who have been the subjects of systemic wrongdoing in organizations. We hope the new horizons we present will help organizations to 'own up' to their wrongdoing in a way that is distinct from the public statements of 'corporation-speak' drafted by lawyers and public relations' agencies. This will be for the future good of the organizations and for the people whom they have abused and exploited.

Finally

When it comes forgiveness, it is easy to laud civility and composure – so often the expected response when it comes to having been wronged. However, unless civility and composure are grounded in something deeper, forgiveness in this context will be elusive. It is also easy to laud forgiveness because we regard forgiveness as a compelling moral good. If we do this, we risk overlooking the rage, brokenness, and anguish of those who have been wronged. Giving voice and justice to the broken in spirit are also compelling moral goods. The victims of abuse and exploitation need closure, justice, and freedom – perhaps more so than those who long for their forgiveness. They need this, whether from the individuals who have wronged them or from organizations or nations. They need truthful apology with justice. If truthful apology and justice result in forgiveness, so much the better.

Part 1

Resentment

Chapter 2

Resentment and Self-Respect

Moral Injuries

Two people may experience the same event. One person shrugs off the impact of the event and is not much troubled by it. To this person talk of wanting or needing to forgive would be an overstatement and even absurd. Others may feel deeply hurt and troubled because in their experience they have been affronted, offended, or injured. They may say they have been demeaned and humiliated; they may also say they are wounded, abused, and violated. They may rage and burn with anger. The generic word typically used to describe these sorts of varieties of feelings people may have is 'resentment', a word that covers the range of responses from feeling irritated, to being indignant, bitter, angry, or furious.[30]

In moral philosophy, resentment is said to arise from 'moral injury'. It is not clear whether in the phrase 'moral injury' the word 'moral' refers to the moral viewpoint of the injured party or the moral viewpoint of the one who caused the injury. In whichever of the two ways the phrase is interpreted, non-moral injuries (that is, injuries that fall outside a view of morality as descriptively or normatively derived) will be excluded. Also excluded as a result will be the possibility of forgiveness for non-moral injuries because in the view of many, forgiveness pertains only to moral injuries.

We disagree with setting a boundary in this way for what may or may not be forgiven. We prefer to think that 'injuries' caused by another's 'behav-

[30] Nussbaum prefers to use the term 'anger' rather than 'resentment' because she observes that in everyday speech resentment may refer to wrongfulness that is not moral (2016, 262). However, one can also be angry about non-moral injuries. This suggests that the word 'anger' is also not suitable. Murphy (whose work we consider often in this book) makes it clear that he is referring to resentment about *moral* injuries. Further, Nussbaum challenges whether the 'normative appropriateness' and 'usefulness' of anger are (i) necessary for 'the protection of dignity and self-respect' when one has been wronged; (ii) 'essential to taking the wrongdoing seriously'; and (iii) 'an essential part of combating injustice' (2016, 6). We hope this book satisfactorily answers her concerns.

iour' are what may be forgiven, whether or not injuries are '*moral* injuries' in whichever ways one may choose to describe what 'moral' is. Within the ambit of what is forgivable, we include *any* form of boundary-transgressing behaviour that leads to hurt, distress, or upset caused to someone by what that person regards to be another person's injurious behaviour, whether or not the behaviour was intended to be boundary transgressing. We therefore regard it as possible to forgive a person for causing an injury through mishap for which no one is to blame.

There is another use of the phrase 'moral injury' that Johnathan Shay, an American psychiatrist, first developed in the 1990s and that has come into use. 'Moral injury' in Shay's sense describes experiences of stress, trauma, and disorientation that arise when someone in leadership and holding responsibility and legitimate authority betrays the ethical core and moral values of those acting in a stressful critical incident (1995, 2002). The betrayal can result in psychological, social, and spiritual trauma for those affected. In caring contexts or combat zones those experiencing moral injury report disorientation, alienation, dislocation, and mental collapse. Though Shay regards moral injury as related to and often comorbid with post-traumatic stress disorder, it is distinct (Shay and Jurist, 2014). In chapter Ten we will consider the relationship of moral injuries as Shay uses the term and the way it is generally used by philosophers. Except where we say otherwise, we will not be confining our use of the phrase 'moral injury' to Shay's more context-specific sense, although we agree that it is right to loosen the scope of 'moral' in the phrase 'moral injury' to refer also the psychosocial effects of the injurious behaviour of others on the injured person.

Strong emotions are not a very 'British' response or a response that is affirmed or celebrated in Britain. This is partly because the elite who shaped British culture were often taught at public schools the Greek philosophical approach to life enunciated by (among others) Aristotle (384-322 BCE). This was popularly summarized as 'nothing to excess' and 'moderation in all thoughts and actions'.[31] Hence those in Britain who exercised power and influence celebrated having a 'stiff upper lip' and taking wrongs 'on the chin'. This was reinforced from an early age through the experience of many in public schools, where pupils were expected to tolerate and accept

[31] For more on this view, see Bash 2020, 53-58.

endemic practices of bullying and of physical and even sexual abuse. To endure without complaint was the expected response.

Related to the Greek philosophical approach to life is the *via media* (literally, 'the middle way'), a maxim meaning it is always best to choose a way between two extremes either by avoiding them or by reconciling them. In Anglicanism the preferred approach of Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) was to find 'the middle way' between forms of Protestantism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism. The same approach is implicit in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* by the influential Anglican thinker, Richard Hooker (1554-1600).[32] The Church of England still maintains this approach to difficult issues, with the Church seeking to tolerate difference through compromise. Of course, compromise may be a wise approach in difficult situations. However, compromise may sometimes also be at the expense of principle and conviction and used speciously to keep disunited factions apparently united.

Resentment – Joseph Butler

As far as we know, the word 'resentment' was first used widely in the context of forgiveness by Joseph Butler (1692-1752), a philosopher-Bishop, in two psychologically perceptive sermons on forgiveness.[33] The sermons are regarded as initiating the start of the modern study of forgiveness and as having a seminal influence on how resentment and its place as a component of forgiveness are understood.

Butler's starting point is that human beings experience 'injury' when they have been wronged by human 'villainy and baseness' or when 'the rules of justice and equity' are flouted (1897, 125). As a result, people may experience 'resentment', 'indignation', and the 'passions' (or, in contemporary language, the 'feelings') of hatred, malice, and revenge (1897, 125). Such feelings are the direct opposite of 'benevolence', the God-given way Butler thinks that human beings should behave towards one another but do not. The reason for the aberrant behaviour is because human beings have

[32] This was first published in 1594: see the edition published in 2013.

[33] The titles of the sermons are 'Upon Resentment' and 'Upon Forgiveness of Injuries. The sermons were the eighth and ninth of fifteen preached in the Rolls Chapel. They were first published in 1726.